1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

136 have any fear of beasts. For, with the exception of man himself, the dog and pig which he has brought, the rat which came in his rafts or canoes, and the fruit bats that may have arrived nestling among his provisions, no mammals of any kind have reached these islands from the land-masses where they evolved. Thus, the native lives free from the fear of animals, or of anything worse than the climate, the mosquitoes, the hurricanes which sometimes spoil his crops or wreck his canoes; and the only living things he is ever called on to defend himself against are other men, as will be seen in the chapter on Warfare. Even the snakes are harmless—although the fear of them is great, owing largely to psychological causes taken advantage of by certain magicians said to have power to change themselves into these creatures, and possibly partly also to a racial memory of continental origin where snakes are physically harmful.

DISTRICTS OF MALEKULA

101 619 The origin of the name Malekula is obscure. Though now used by those of the younger natives who have been on plantations and speak pidgin-English, there is no known native dialect to which it belongs. Dr. Ivens suggests that the first half of the word, which corresponds with that of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, means simply "people," and points out that in both islands overt descent is patrilineal, while their neighbours are for the most part matrilineal.[1] However this may be, no natives of any part of Malekula today possess any name for the whole island. This may be due partly to the restricted nature of their geographical knowledge,[2] but may also be attributed to the complete lack of any cohesion, either political or linguistic, or even racial, of the innumerable small groups that form its scattered population.

131 It is not my intention to attempt here any but the briefest survey of the cultures of Malekula, an island with an area of about 780 square miles (that is to say about half the size of Cornwall, which it resembles somewhat in shape), where, apart from other cultural differ[197]ences, the languages are so numerous that each group of villages speaks a distinct dialect of its own sufficiently different from that of its neighbours that a journey of three miles often takes one into an entirely distinct linguistic area. So unknown are most parts of Malekula still today, and so intricate the mountain ranges that intersect it, that few parts of the interior have even been visited by a white man, and almost the whole of our very limited knowledge of it is confined to a few of the coastal districts.

[1] Ivens, 5, p. 20.

[2] This statement may seem strange in view of the existence of sea-going canoes. It is a fact, however, that in spite of their voyages to other islands over what I have termed the inland sea, not even traditions exist of any Small Island canoe having ever sailed round Malekula.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
OO12 Malekula OO12

Pygmoids in the mountains.

Among this medley of small communities, each having contact only with its immediate neighbours, there are nevertheless certain broad distinctions to be drawn.

First among these is the definite racial distinction between the coastal peoples as a whole, including those inhabiting the northern plateau, all of whom share certain physical characteristics in common, and the small, almost pygmoid inhabitants of the mountainous interior of South Malekula who represent the last remnants of an earlier racial stock similar to that found also in the interior of certain other of the larger land-masses in the Western Pacific. Though some of these occasionally come down to the coast at South-West Bay and other spots, practically nothing is known about them.

"Mat-skirt" and "Fringe-skirt."

Among the remaining inhabitants of the island Deacon drew a broad distinction between what he termed the "mat-skirt" people and the "fringe-skirt" people, based on the different types of dress worn by the women.[1] The mat-skirt is a plaited strip made of split pandanus leaves worn round the buttocks with short lengths left unplaited at either end which, when worn, are gathered together in front. It is invariably dyed red, and often decorated with geometric patterns coloured a faint yellow on account of the turmeric bath in which the mats are soaked before applying the red dye, these being bound round a stick during the dyeing process in such a way as to form the desired pattern by preventing the red dye from reaching the parts so bound.[2] The fringe-skirt is, on the other hand, a short petticoat made of shredded banana leaves or numerous pieces of finely twisted string undyed and hanging loosely about the loins. The mat-skirt is worn, with one exception, by the women of all the coastal peoples, and of those inhabiting the northern and southern extremities of the island, among all of whom the men wear a penis-wrapper made of similar material. The fringe-skirt is worn by the women of one coastal district only, namely Mewun, immediately to the north of South-West Bay, and is also the characteristic female dress of those tribes inhabiting the interior of Central Malekula. These two types of dress correspond also with an important cultural distinction, the use of the mat-skirt being definitely correlated with the megalithic culture practised by all the mat-skirt people but not by the fringe-skirted inhabitants of the interior. While it is true that the inhabitants of Mewun already mentioned, whose women wear the fringe-skirt, also perform megalithic rites, these latter have only been adopted by them during recent years. The same also applies to the neighbouring island of Ambrim, where a similar state of

[1] Deacon, 4, pp. 702 ff.
[2] This process is technically known as "reserved dyeing."

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
OO12 Malekula OO12
Small Islands

ATCHIN TWENTY YEARS AGO

JOHN W. LAYARD

ATCHIN[1] is one of a string of five small coral islands, the others being Vao, Wala, Rano, and Uripiv, lying off the north-east coast of Malekula, the inhabitants of which form an ethnic unit and refer to themselves as Sea Folk in contra-distinction to what they term the Bush Folk of the Malekulan mainland. The islands are remarkably uniform, both in size and situation, each covering an area of about half a square mile, and being separated from the mainland by a channel about half a mile wide. Each island supports a population of from four hundred to five hundred varying in physique and in intelligence as much as any average English community, from individuals with comparatively light copper-coloured skin and a degree of intelligence equal at least to that of an intelligent white man, to those of much darker pigmentation and minds approximating more closely to the white man's idea of what he is pleased to call a "savage." Since there is no room for cultivation, the inhabitants of each island own a strip of land on that part of the Malekulan mainland immediately opposite to it, on which they till their gardens. In addition to the communally owned long-distance canoes, in which they sail long distances on trading expeditions, each man possesses a coastal canoe, and the fleet of small canoes sailing or paddling over to the mainland every morning during the agricultural season and returning at night laden with food is one of the most pleasing sights that can be seen in Malekula.

Though forming an ethnic unit, these islands have no central government, nor are there any chiefs such as exist among the Big Nambas of the North Malekulan Plateau. Each of these minute communities (the population of Atchin at the time of my visit numbered 401) has its own language, as distinct from that of its neighbours as any two cognate European languages, and is

[1] With regard to the origin of the word "Atchin," the name given to this island by its own inhabitants is *tsan*, to which, when speaking of it from afar, is prefixed the directional particle *nga*. The work of the Admiralty Survey on these islands is on the whole correct, so that I was puzzled by the considerable divergence in sound between the words *nga-tsan* and Atchin. A second puzzle was presented by the fact that the names given on the Admiralty Chart for the only three Malekulan mountains marked in the vicinity of Atchin were not the names of mountains at all, but the names of villages situated much nearer the coast, in a dialect which differed somewhat both from the Malekulan and from the Atchin pronunciation. Nor did there appear to be any directional relationship between the mountains and the respective villages which were alleged to bear their names. This conundrum remained unsolved till, on visiting the neighbouring island of Wala, I found that in the language spoken there the name for Atchin was *tsin* and the directional particle *a*. From the much closer approximation of the white man's word Atchin to the Wala *a-tsin* it occurred to me that the surveying party, or that section of it which had recorded the name, probably landed on Wala. This supposition was confirmed on finding that the names of the three villages, wrongly used for mountains (viz. Rarab, Batelembe, and Lalembe), were also in the Wala dialect, and that the villages themselves were situated in an approximately direct line between the mountains and Wala. Though I have not looked up the records, it is thus clear that the surveyors, standing on Wala, were given not only the name Atchin, but also, when pointing at the mountains, were given the names, not of the mountains, but of the intervening villages to which the natives thought they were pointing.

[p. 342]